

§ 20-11. Issuance of limited learner's permit and provisional drivers license to person who is less than 18 years old.

(a) Process. – Safe driving requires instruction in driving and experience. To ensure that a person who is less than 18 years old has both instruction and experience before obtaining a drivers license, driving privileges are granted first on a limited basis and are then expanded in accordance with the following process:

- (1) Level 1. – Driving with a limited learner's permit.
- (2) Level 2. – Driving with a limited provisional license.
- (3) Level 3. – Driving with a full provisional license.

A permit or license issued under this section must indicate the level of driving privileges granted by the permit or license.

(b) Level 1. – A person who is at least 15 years old but less than 18 years old may obtain a limited learner's permit if the person meets all of the following requirements:

- (1) Passes a course of driver education prescribed in G.S. 115C-215 or a course of driver instruction at a licensed commercial driver training school.
- (2) Passes a written test administered by the Division.
- (3) Has a driving eligibility certificate or a high school diploma or its equivalent.

(c) Level 1 Restrictions. – A limited learner's permit authorizes the permit holder to drive a specified type or class of motor vehicle only under the following conditions:

- (1) The permit holder must be in possession of the permit.
- (2) A supervising driver must be seated beside the permit holder in the front seat of the vehicle when it is in motion. No person other than the supervising driver can be in the front seat.
- (3) For the first six months after issuance, the permit holder may drive only between the hours of 5:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m.
- (4) After the first six months after issuance, the permit holder may drive at any time.
- (5) Every person occupying the vehicle being driven by the permit holder must have a safety belt properly fastened about his or her body, or be restrained by a child passenger restraint system as provided in G.S. 20-137.1(a), when the vehicle is in motion.
- (6) The permit holder shall not use a mobile telephone or other additional technology associated with a mobile telephone while operating the motor vehicle on a public street or highway or public vehicular area.

(d) Level 2. – A person who is at least 16 years old but less than 18 years old may obtain a limited provisional license if the person meets all of the following requirements:

- (1) Has held a limited learner's permit issued by the Division for at least nine months.
- (2) Has not been convicted of a motor vehicle moving violation or seat belt infraction or a violation of G.S. 20-137.3 during the preceding six months.
- (3) Passes a road test administered by the Division or by a commercial driver training school certified by the Division to administer road tests.
- (4) Has a driving eligibility certificate or a high school diploma or its equivalent.
- (5) Has completed a driving log, on a form approved by the Division, detailing a minimum of 60 hours as the operator of a motor vehicle of a class for which the driver has been issued a limited learner's permit. The log must show at least 10 hours of the required driving occurred during nighttime hours. No more than 10 hours of driving per week may be counted toward the 60-hour requirement. The driving log must be signed by the supervising driver and submitted to the Division at the time the applicant seeks to obtain a limited

provisional license. If the Division has cause to believe that a driving log has been falsified, the limited learner's permit holder shall be required to complete a new driving log with the same requirements and shall not be eligible to obtain a limited provisional license for six months.

(e) Level 2 Restrictions. – A limited provisional license authorizes the license holder to drive a specified type or class of motor vehicle only under the following conditions:

- (1) The license holder shall be in possession of the license.
- (2) The license holder may drive without supervision in any of the following circumstances:
 - a. From 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.
 - b. When driving directly to or from work.
 - c. When driving directly to or from an activity of a volunteer fire department, volunteer rescue squad, or volunteer emergency medical service, if the driver is a member of the organization.
- (3) The license holder may drive with supervision at any time. When the license holder is driving with supervision, the supervising driver shall be seated beside the license holder in the front seat of the vehicle when it is in motion. The supervising driver need not be the only other occupant of the front seat, but shall be the person seated next to the license holder.
- (4) When the license holder is driving the vehicle and is not accompanied by the supervising driver, there may be no more than one passenger under 21 years of age in the vehicle. This limit does not apply to passengers who are members of the license holder's immediate family or whose primary residence is the same household as the license holder. However, if a family member or member of the same household as the license holder who is younger than 21 years of age is a passenger in the vehicle, no other passengers under 21 years of age, who are not members of the license holder's immediate family or members of the license holder's household, may be in the vehicle, except that one other passenger under 21 years of age who is not a member of the license holder's immediate family or member of the license holder's household may be in the vehicle when that passenger is a student being driven directly to or from school.
- (5) Every person occupying the vehicle being driven by the license holder shall have a safety belt properly fastened about his or her body, or be restrained by a child passenger restraint system as provided in G.S. 20-137.1(a), when the vehicle is in motion.
- (6) The license holder shall not use a mobile telephone or other additional technology associated with a mobile telephone while operating the vehicle on a public street or highway or public vehicular area.

(f) Level 3. – A person who is at least 16 years old but less than 18 years old may obtain a full provisional license if the person meets all of the following requirements:

- (1) Has held a limited provisional license issued by the Division for at least six months.
- (2) Has not been convicted of a motor vehicle moving violation or seat belt infraction or a violation of G.S. 20-137.3 during the preceding six months.
- (3) Has a driving eligibility certificate or a high school diploma or its equivalent.
- (4) Repealed by Session Laws 2025-91, s. 2, effective September 30, 2025, and applicable to licenses issued or renewed on or after that date.

A person who meets these requirements may obtain a full provisional license remotely, as provided in G.S. 20-7(f)(6).

(g) Level 3 Restrictions. – The restrictions on Level 1 and Level 2 drivers concerning time of driving, supervision, and passenger limitations do not apply to a full provisional license. However, the prohibition against operating a motor vehicle while using a mobile telephone under G.S. 20-137.3(b) shall apply to a full provisional license.

(h) Exception for Persons 16 to 18 Who Have an Unrestricted Out-of-State License. – A person who is at least 16 years old but less than 18 years old, who was a resident of another state and has an unrestricted drivers license issued by that state, and who becomes a resident of this State may obtain one of the following upon the submission of a driving eligibility certificate or a high school diploma or its equivalent:

- (1) A temporary permit, if the person has not completed a drivers education program that meets the requirements of the Superintendent of Public Instruction but is currently enrolled in a drivers education program that meets these requirements. A temporary permit is valid for the period specified in the permit and authorizes the holder of the permit to drive a specified type or class of motor vehicle when in possession of the permit, subject to any restrictions imposed by the Division concerning time of driving, supervision, and passenger limitations. The period must end within 10 days after the expected completion date of the drivers education program in which the applicant is enrolled.
- (2) A full provisional license, if the person has completed a drivers education program that meets the requirements of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, has held the license issued by the other state for at least 12 months, and has not been convicted during the preceding six months of a motor vehicle moving violation, a seat belt infraction, or an offense committed in another jurisdiction that would be a motor vehicle moving violation or seat belt infraction if committed in this State.
- (2a) A full provisional license, if the person has completed a drivers education program that meets the requirements of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, has held both a learner's permit and a restricted license from another state for at least six months each, the Commissioner finds that the requirements for the learner's permit and restricted license are comparable to the requirements for a learner's permit and restricted license in this State, and the person has not been convicted during the preceding six months of a motor vehicle moving violation, a seat belt infraction, or an offense committed in another jurisdiction that would be a moving violation or a seat belt infraction if committed in this State.
- (3) A limited provisional license, if the person has completed a drivers education program that meets the requirements of the Superintendent of Public Instruction but either did not hold the license issued by the other state for at least 12 months or was convicted during the preceding six months of a motor vehicle moving violation, a seat belt infraction, or an offense committed in another jurisdiction that would be a motor vehicle moving violation or seat belt infraction if committed in this State.

(h1) Exception for Persons 16 to 18 Who Have an Out-of-State Restricted License. – A person who is at least 16 years old but less than 18 years old, who was a resident of another state and has a restricted drivers license issued by that state, and who becomes a resident of this State may obtain one of the following:

- (1) A limited provisional license, if the person has completed a drivers education program that meets the requirements of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, held the restricted license issued by the other state for at least 12

months, and whose parent or guardian certifies that the person has not been convicted during the preceding six months of a motor vehicle moving violation, a seat belt infraction, or an offense committed in another jurisdiction that would be a motor vehicle moving violation or seat belt infraction if committed in this State.

- (2) A limited learners permit, if the person has completed a drivers education program that meets the requirements of the Superintendent of Public Instruction but either did not hold the restricted license issued by the other state for at least 12 months or was convicted during the preceding six months of a motor vehicle moving violation, a seat belt infraction, or an offense committed in another jurisdiction that would be a motor vehicle moving violation or seat belt infraction if committed in this State. A person who qualifies for a limited learners permit under this subdivision and whose parent or guardian certifies that the person has not been convicted of a moving violation in the preceding six months shall be deemed to have held a limited learners permit in this State for each month the person held a restricted license in another state.

(h2) Exception for Persons Age 15 Who Have an Out-of-State Unrestricted or Restricted License. – A person who is age 15, who was a resident of another state, has an unrestricted or restricted drivers license issued by that state, and who becomes a resident of this State may obtain a limited learners permit if the person has completed a drivers education program that meets the requirements of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. A person who qualifies for a limited learners permit under this subsection and whose parent or guardian certifies that the person has not been convicted of a moving violation in the preceding six months shall be deemed to have held a limited learners permit in this State for each month the person held an unrestricted or restricted license in another state.

(h3) Exception for Persons Less Than Age 18 Who Have a Federally Issued Unrestricted or Restricted License. – A person who is less than age 18, who has an unrestricted or restricted drivers license issued by the federal government, and who becomes a resident of this State may obtain a limited provisional license or a provisional license if the person has completed a drivers education program substantially equivalent to the drivers education program that meets the requirements of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. A person who qualifies for a limited provisional license or a provisional license under this subsection and whose parent or guardian certifies that the person has not been convicted of a moving violation in the preceding six months shall be deemed to have held a limited provisional license or a provisional license in this State for each month the person held an unrestricted or restricted license issued by the federal government.

(i) Application. – An application for a permit or license authorized by this section must be signed by both the applicant and another person. That person must be:

- (1) The applicant's parent or guardian;
- (2) A person approved by the applicant's parent or guardian; or
- (3) A person approved by the Division.
- (4) With respect to minors in the legal custody of the county department of social services, any of the following:
 - a. A guardian ad litem or attorney advocate appointed to advocate for the minor under G.S. 7B-601.
 - b. The director of the county department of social services or the director's designee.
 - c. If no person listed in sub-subdivision a. or b. of this subdivision is available, the court with continuing jurisdiction over the minor's placement under G.S. 7B-1000(b).

(j) **Duration and Fee.** – A limited learner's permit expires on the eighteenth birthday of the permit holder. A limited provisional license expires on the eighteenth birthday of the license holder. A limited learner's permit or limited provisional license issued under this section that expires on a weekend or State holiday shall remain valid through the fifth regular State business day following the date of expiration. A full provisional license expires on the date set under G.S. 20-7(f). The fee for a limited learner's permit or a limited provisional license is twenty-one dollars and fifty cents (\$21.50). The fee for a full provisional license is the amount set under G.S. 20-7(i).

(k) **Supervising Driver.** – A supervising driver shall be a parent, grandparent, or guardian of the permit holder or license holder or a responsible person approved by the parent or guardian or the Division. A supervising driver shall be a licensed driver who has been licensed for at least five years. At least one supervising driver shall sign the application for a permit or license.

(l) **Violations.** – It is unlawful for the holder of a limited learner's permit, a temporary permit, or a limited provisional license to drive a motor vehicle in violation of the restrictions that apply to the permit or license. Failure to comply with a restriction concerning the time of driving or the presence of a supervising driver in the vehicle constitutes operating a motor vehicle without a license. Failure to comply with the restriction regarding the use of a mobile telephone while operating a motor vehicle is an infraction punishable by a fine of twenty-five dollars (\$25.00). Failure to comply with any other restriction, including seating and passenger limitations, is an infraction punishable by a monetary penalty as provided in G.S. 20-176. Failure to comply with the provisions of subsections (e) and (g) of this section shall not constitute negligence per se or contributory negligence by the driver or passenger in any action for the recovery of damages arising out of the operation, ownership or maintenance of a motor vehicle. Any evidence of failure to comply with the provisions of subdivisions (1), (2), (3), (4), and (5) of subsection (e) of this section shall not be admissible in any criminal or civil trial, action, or proceeding except in an action based on a violation of this section. No drivers license points or insurance surcharge shall be assessed for failure to comply with seating and occupancy limitations in subsection (e) of this section. No drivers license points or insurance surcharge shall be assessed for failure to comply with subsection (e) or (g) of this section regarding the use of a mobile telephone while operating a motor vehicle.

(m) **Insurance Status.** – The holder of a limited learner's permit is not considered a licensed driver for the purpose of determining the inexperienced operator premium surcharge under automobile insurance policies.

(n) **Driving Eligibility Certificate.** – A person who desires to obtain a permit or license issued under this section must have a high school diploma or its equivalent or must have a driving eligibility certificate. A driving eligibility certificate must meet the following conditions:

- (1) The person who is required to sign the certificate under subdivision (4) of this subsection must show that he or she has determined that one of the following requirements is met:
 - a. The person is currently enrolled in school and is making progress toward obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent.
 - b. A substantial hardship would be placed on the person or the person's family if the person does not receive a certificate.
 - c. The person cannot make progress toward obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent.
- (1a) The person who is required to sign the certificate under subdivision (4) of this subsection also must show that one of the following requirements is met:
 - a. The person who seeks a permit or license issued under this section is not subject to subsection (n1) of this section.

- b. The person who seeks a permit or license issued under this section is subject to subsection (n1) of this section and is eligible for the certificate under that subsection.
- (2) It must be on a form approved by the Division.
- (3) It must be dated within 30 days of the date the person applies for a permit or license issuable under this section.
- (4) It must be signed by the applicable person named below:
 - a. The principal, or the principal's designee, of the public school in which the person is enrolled.
 - b. The administrator, or the administrator's designee, of the nonpublic school in which the person is enrolled.
 - c. The person who provides the academic instruction in the home school in which the person is enrolled.
 - c1. The person who provides the academic instruction in the home in accordance with an educational program found by a court, prior to July 1, 1998, to comply with the compulsory attendance law.
 - d. The designee of the board of directors of the charter school in which the person is enrolled.
 - e. The president, or the president's designee, of the community college in which the person is enrolled.

Notwithstanding any other law, the decision concerning whether a driving eligibility certificate was properly issued or improperly denied shall be appealed only as provided under the rules adopted in accordance with G.S. 115C-12(28), 115D-10.70, or 115C-566, whichever is applicable, and may not be appealed under this Chapter.

(n1) Lose Control; Lose License.

- (1) The following definitions apply in this subsection:
 - a. Applicable State entity. – The State Board of Education for public schools and charter schools, the State Board of Community Colleges for community colleges, or the Secretary of Administration for nonpublic schools and home schools.
 - b. Certificate. – A driving eligibility certificate that meets the conditions of subsection (n) of this section.
 - c. Disciplinary action. – An expulsion, a suspension for more than 10 consecutive days, or an assignment to an alternative educational setting for more than 10 consecutive days.
 - d. Enumerated student conduct. – One of the following behaviors that results in disciplinary action:
 - 1. The possession or sale of an alcoholic beverage or an illegal controlled substance on school property.
 - 2. The bringing, possession, or use on school property of a weapon or firearm that resulted in disciplinary action under G.S. 115C-390.10 or that could have resulted in that disciplinary action if the conduct had occurred in a public school.
 - 3. The physical assault on a teacher or other school personnel on school property.
 - e. School. – A public school, charter school, community college, nonpublic school, or home school.
 - f. School administrator. – The person who is required to sign certificates under subdivision (4) of subsection (n) of this section.

- g. School property. – The physical premises of the school, school buses or other vehicles under the school's control or contract and that are used to transport students, and school-sponsored curricular or extracurricular activities that occur on or off the physical premises of the school.
 - h. Student. – A person who desires to obtain a permit or license issued under this section.
- (2) Any student who was subject to disciplinary action for enumerated student conduct that occurred either after the first day of July before the school year in which the student enrolled in the eighth grade or after the student's fourteenth birthday, whichever event occurred first, is subject to this subsection.
 - (3) A student who is subject to this subsection is eligible for a certificate when the school administrator determines that the student has exhausted all administrative appeals connected to the disciplinary action and that one of the following conditions is met:
 - a. The enumerated student conduct occurred before the student reached the age of 15, and the student is now at least 16 years old.
 - b. The enumerated student conduct occurred after the student reached the age of 15, and it is at least one year after the date the student exhausted all administrative appeals connected to the disciplinary action.
 - c. The student needs the certificate in order to drive to and from school, a drug or alcohol treatment counseling program, as appropriate, or a mental health treatment program, and no other transportation is available.
 - (4) A student whose permit or license is denied or revoked due to ineligibility for a certificate under this subsection may otherwise be eligible for a certificate if, after six months from the date of the ineligibility, the school administrator determines that one of the following conditions is met:
 - a. The student has returned to school or has been placed in an alternative educational setting, and has displayed exemplary student behavior, as defined by the applicable State entity.
 - b. The disciplinary action was for the possession or sale of an alcoholic beverage or an illegal controlled substance on school property, and the student subsequently attended and successfully completed, as defined by the applicable State entity, a drug or alcohol treatment counseling program, as appropriate. (1935, c. 52, s. 6; 1953, c. 355; 1955, c. 1187, s. 8; 1963, c. 968, ss. 2, 2A; 1965, c. 410, s. 3; c. 1171; 1967, c. 694; 1969, c. 37; 1973, c. 191, ss. 1, 2; c. 664, ss. 1, 2; 1975, c. 79; c. 716, s. 5; 1979, c. 101; c. 667, ss. 15, 16, 41; 1981 (Reg. Sess., 1982), c. 1257, s. 2; 1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 1021, s. 11; 1991, c. 689, s. 326; 1993, c. 539, s. 319; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 24, s. 14(c); 1997-16, s. 1; 1997-443, s. 32.20; 1997-507, s. 1; 1998-149, ss. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5; 1998-212, s. 9.21(c); 1999-243, ss. 1, 2; 1999-276, s. 1; 1999-387, s. 4; 1999-452, s. 9; 2001-194, s. 1; 2001-487, s. 51.5(a); 2002-73, ss. 1, 2; 2002-159, s. 30; 2005-276, s. 44.1(b); 2006-177, ss. 2-7; 2011-145, s. 28.37(d); 2011-282, s. 15; 2011-381, s. 3; 2011-385, ss. 1-3; 2011-412, s. 3.2; 2015-135, s. 4.2; 2015-241, s. 29.30(b); 2021-24, s. 1; 2021-134, s. 12; 2021-185, s. 15(a); 2023-13, ss. 1(a), 2(a), 3(a); 2025-56, s. 2(a); 2025-91, s. 2.)